

Proactive planning, resources crucial to IA pre-deployment process

PART 2:

BY REBECCA PERRON
Military Newspapers of Virginia

Since taking over as the Executive Agent of the Navy's Individual Augmentee (IA) Continuum, which supports the global war on terrorism (GWOT), U.S. Fleet Forces Command has continued to refine the policies and processes that provide IA Sailors and their families with the best pre-deployment guidance, support and resources.

Navy IAs make up more than 5 percent of "boots on the ground" forces in the GWOT effort with about 8,300 active duty and reserve Sailors assigned to non-traditional deployments of six to 18 months. Assignments can vary from duty in Iraq, Afghanistan or Kuwait to Qatar, the Horn of Africa, South America and other locations. But most IAs are assigned to the 26-nation Central Command region. According to the Army's requesting agent, Sailors can be tasked with more than 300 different mission assignments with at least 80 percent matching Navy skill sets.

Through the global war on terrorism support assignment (GSA) detailing initiative implemented in 2007, active duty Sailors can volunteer or apply for many traditional and nontraditional roles. Detailers can assign an IA tour that falls within their normal window for negotiating dates and aligns with Periodic Rotation Orders, allowing more stability for Sailors and their families. Using your Common Access Card on a NMCI computer, assignments can be negotiated under the Career Management System-Interactive Detailing at <https://www.cmsid.navy.mil>.

Information Systems Technician 2nd Class Stephen Courtney negotiated for GSA orders to Djibouti when he prepared to transfer from USS Essex (LHD 2) last year, and has been able to receive firm follow-on orders after the IA tour.

"I told my detailer I wanted a new experience, and I wanted to help out and serve my country," Courtney said during basic skills combat training at Fort Jackson, S.C. "After my IA tour, I will transfer to NCTAMS Pacific."

As this new GSA process is fully implemented, it will reduce the frequency of the impromptu tasking of Sailors mid-tour.

"In the past, most IA Sailors often received only a 60-day notification before they were required to report for their IA assignments," explained Capt. Jeffrey L. McKenzie, commanding officer of the Expeditionary Combat Readiness Center (ECRC) at Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek. "Through the implementation of sourcing IA requirements through GSA assignments, the number of Sailors receiving less than many months notice has been reduced."

While serving their IA assignment, GSA Sailors fall under the purview of ECRC, which performs parent command responsibilities until the Sailor reports to their next command after the IA tour. ECRC also oversees processing, equipping, training, certifying and deploying all IAs, as well as providing proactive family support. According to McKenzie, the implementation of the GSA process is just one of the many changes that have made significant improvements in the process for the Sailor and their family.

"An IA tour is very different in every aspect from what it was two years ago," McKenzie continued. "The entire process has been smoothed out tremendously."

Some of these changes include creating funnel points and the ECRC pre-deployment expeditionary screening checklist to standardize the process.

"It wasn't surprising when we had fairly large attrition rates at the Army facilities when our Sailors were showing up to be trained," McKenzie said. "Now, that attrition rate at the Army facilities is less than 1 percent, and this is a result of funneling all IAs through one of the four Navy Mobilization Processing Sites and standardization throughout the process."

IA and GSA Sailors generally follow the same processes from the receipt of orders through processing into theater. Once orders are received, Sailors must use the ECRC IA Checklist

Gunner's Mate 3rd Class James Miller ensures the operability of his weapon during Navy Individual Augmentee Combat Training (NIACT). IA Sailors are deployed worldwide in combat support and combat service support missions.



(TOP) – Chemical, biological and radiological tester Clevon Ramone Maye helps AD2 Eugene Mansueto with the fit of his gas mask. Gas mask fittings are performed during the week IA Sailors spend at the Naval Mobilization Processing Site. Mansueto is headed to Fort Lewis, Wash., for Navy Individual Augmentee Combat Training (NIACT), and then to Baghdad, Iraq, for his IA assignment. (RIGHT) – AD2 Eugene Mansueto gives a "thumbs up" to signal his gas mask has a proper fit.



Photos by Harry Gerwien / Military Newspapers of Virginia

to prepare for the pre-deployment expeditionary screening process. The checklist is posted on the ECRC Web site at www.ecrc.navy.mil and on the IA page of Navy Knowledge Online (NKO). The checklist must be submitted electronically to ECRC within 14 days of receipt of orders.

To help each Sailor complete the checklist and be as prepared for deployment as possible, all commands are required to designate a command IA coordinator (CIAC) to assist IA Sailors.

"We still rely heavily on the parent command to fulfill their responsibility," McKenzie said. "Part of that is to have the CIAC at each command – to help the Sailor prepare, keep in contact with the families and pass information along to them. We are seeing more and better engagement by the fleet units."

Lt. Jim Frey, IA coordinator for Helicopter Sea Combat Wing Atlantic at Naval Station Norfolk, oversees CIACs from the seven east coast helicopter squadrons and believes the first step to giving IA Sailors the support they need is to bring in the right people as CIACs.

After completing an IA assignment in Iraq in December 2007, Frey returned to write an IA and family support mobilization instruction for his command. His instruction details how to select the right CIAC, as well as a series of requirements to provide continuous support for the IA Sailor and their families from the receipt of orders to 12 months after return from the tour.

"Being a CIAC is not a self-licking ice cream cone," Frey explained. "It's not something you do, and then it creates itself. You have to work at it."

Capt. Mark Hunter, NAS Oceana's commanding officer, currently has six Sailors in theater and said his main role is to stay connected with these Sailors and their families.

"I interview them before they leave to start their training, keep in touch with their families and make sure everything is ok for them here," Hunter said. "I stay in touch throughout. I make sure they have the right points of contact for whatever resources the Sailor and their family need. Then I interview them when they return, make sure they follow up with new procedures, such as medical, to make sure they don't fall through the cracks."

For the CIAC, Frey said the biggest issue is staying self-motivated and being proactive to keep in touch with the Sailor and the family, to know the resources available and point the Sailor and the

family in the right directions. To help his CIACs stay on track, the wing's instruction requires them to attend each workshop given by Fleet and Family Support Center (FFSC) for the IA Continuum.

"These FFSC courses are critical to getting in the proper mindset and understanding the level of support that is expected," Frey said. "FFSC offers non-traditional deployment briefs, post-deployment briefs and CIAC briefs. We require all the CIACs attend all the classes."

Experience has shown Frey that personal, financial and other issues

their family. Another big concern for the Sailor is, will their children recognize them when they return?

"I try to cover points that apply to everyone in the group, whether married or single," Farmer continued. "Single Sailors don't always think about the necessity for powers of attorney or wills, or who will handle their belongings in storage."

Farmer frequently holds one-on-one briefs with couples. And when any need is identified, she puts them in contact with personal counselors and the correct resources. Farmer believes many Sailors may not be aware of how

much FFSC has to offer for IA Sailors and their families throughout every phase of the deployment.

"Commands must recognize that the IA process starts when orders are in hand, and the command and the Sailor must start the process then," Farmer suggested. "The key to a better IA experience and to better ready the Sailor for return is proactive pre-deployment preparation."

Once the CIAC, FFSC and the IA Sailor have done everything to prepare for the deployment, the next step for the Sailor is the first stop on most IA tours – NMPS. Sailors process through the NMPS location written in their orders, which is determined by training criteria and unit requirements. Sailors can process through the NMPS in Norfolk or San Diego, Calif., or in Port Hueneme, Calif., or Gulfport, Miss., which primarily support Seabees. Traditionally, NMPS locations processed

reservists who were mobilized during wartime. NMPS has been overseeing the mobilization process for active duty IA Sailors as well since 2005.

"In the spring of 2007, we were able to take the process at NMPS from 14 days down to five," said Cmdr. Liz Stephens, the OIC of the Norfolk NMPS. "The weekly average is 150 with surges up to 450. Larger numbers come through the week before the class convenes at Fort Jackson, so about every three weeks, a predictable number of Sailors shows up."

"Medical is about 60 percent of what we do," Stephens explained. "Navy leadership over the years has focused more on individual medical readiness."

For Courtney, the week at NMPS helped him finish the last of his requirements.

"NMPS helped me with a power of attorney and a will," Courtney said. "The Fleet and Family Support Center helped me with information about mailing packages. Getting ready for the process was easy overall. ECRC was very helpful. I used the ECRC Helpdesk three times to get answers."

Arrival at NMPS with incomplete or incorrect checklist items may result in delays and possible disqualification. According to Stephens, approximately 4 percent of IA Sailors are disqualified while at NMPS, mostly due to medical reasons. IA Sailors who are TAD will be returned to their parent command, and if cleared, may be given IA orders at a later date.

GSA Sailors may lose their orders and may have to renegotiate if they are disqualified after leaving their current command, which can cause further problems for families who have already been moved. In either IA or GSA disqualification cases, another Sailor may receive quick-fill orders to take their place.

The week at NMPS is finalized with travel claim processing and transportation briefs.

"Most will take buses to Fort Jackson, S.C. or Fort Dix, N.J., for training," Stephens said. "Some will take NALO flights to other training locations. But all will travel over the course of the weekend. Fifty percent of all IAs go to Fort Jackson for three weeks of basic combat skills training, such as field medical and survival and weapons training. Those who need mission-specific training may go to another site for follow-on training. Fleet Forces ultimately decides what training is required for each mission and reserves the slot at each training site."

According to Stephens, the training sites other than Fort Jackson are much different, and have longer, more specific training. Fort Jackson has a Navy-managed training site with a course put together by the Army. The Army runs the other training sites.

Once all mission-essential training is completed, most IA Sailors travel to Kuwait for processing before arriving at their in-theater assignment, and embarking on what many, including Frey, call the best tour of their career.

QUICK FACTS:

The Navy Family Accountability and Assessment System (NFAAS) standardizes a method for the Navy to enter, update, maintain and review personal and family contact information. NFAAS is also used to account for Navy families in times of crisis, allowing commanders to make strategic decisions which facilitate a return to stability. Beginning in 2008, IA Sailors are required to ensure their family's contact information is up to date in NFAAS as part of the ECRC IA checklist.

ECRC's Family Readiness Department acts as an information and resource referral for IA/GSA families. IA/GSA families may contact the ECRC IA Family Helpdesk at ecrc.fs.fct@navy.mil for help with general questions. ECRC also operates a 24-hour toll free family hotline for IA/GSA family emergencies at (877) 364-4302.

Commercial email accounts may be better to use as contact in theater than government accounts. Often, Sailors are mobile and access to navy.mil email or other government accounts assigned in theater may not be available, making commercial accounts the most reliable. Commands should make getting account information for both the IA Sailor and their family a priority.

ECRC detachments in Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan provide processing centers for travel and travel claims and provides central points for Sailors to enter their area of assignment. The processing centers have replaced dozens of points of entry and departure, as well as reduced travel liquidation from six months down to 48 hours.

NMPS Processing Schedule:

Monday: Check-in, briefs by NMPS, Chaplain, Legal, ECRC, PSD (Reserves) and Medical/Dental; Uniform fittings.
Tuesday: Medical processing, ECRC GSA brief.
Wednesday: Group PT, Medical processing continues, CAC appts., FFSC Pre-Deployment Brief.
Thursday: Group PT, CAC appts., gas mask fitting, ECRC briefs.
Friday: Travel claim and transportation briefs, will execution, uniform issue, glasses distribution, check-out.

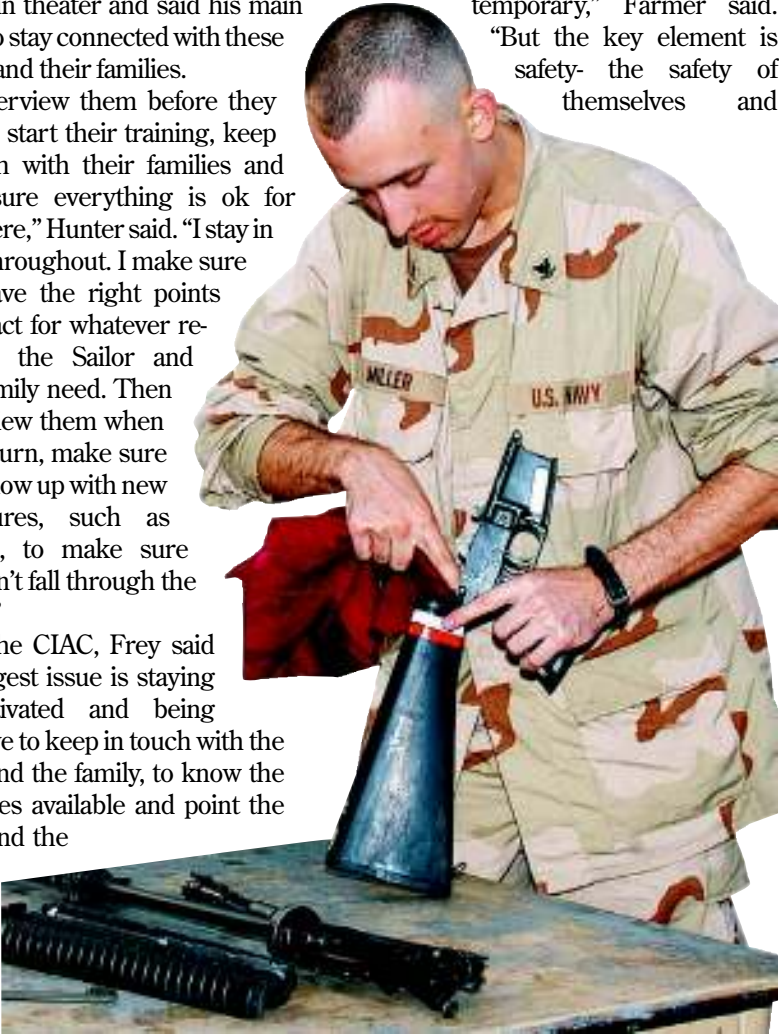


Photo by MCC Gwen A. Truett/ECRC

NEXT WEEK: PART 3 of Assignment: Army - Decoding the Navy's IA Continuum continues.